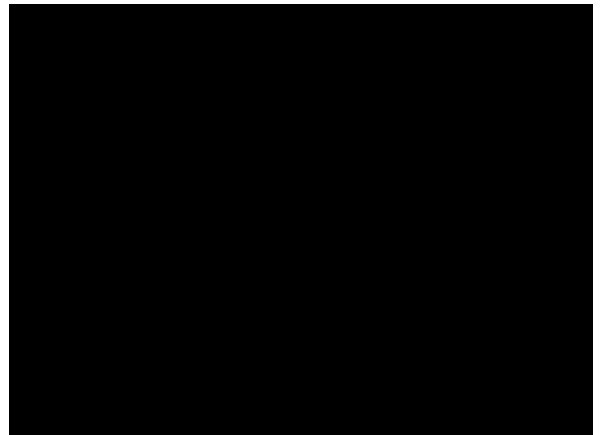


# Finance Goes Expeditionary

by Lieutenant Colonel Paul Hough

**O**n 10 October 1998, at 2145 hours local, SSgt Jackie McElroy lifted off from RAF Lakenheath, UK, in a heavily laden C-130. She was carrying \$50,000 cash and was the only armed person on-board. This was Chalk 1 of 23 headed for Cervia Air Base, Italy, in support of **Operation Sky Anvil**. At this point, she was the sole financial lifeline for the 48th Expeditionary Operations Group (EOG), which was forward deploying to support potential air operations in response to the ethnic crisis in Kosovo. Operation Sky Anvil validated both the Air Expeditionary Force concept and the value of Top Dollar.

The Cervia deployment came with very little warning. The slaughter and forced removal of ethnic Albanians in the Yugoslavian province of Kosovo precipitated an international crisis. NATO initiated Operation Sky Anvil to send a strong signal to the Serbian controlled government of Yugoslavia that further atrocities would not be tolerated. The 48th Fighter Wing received a heads-up on 7 October that most likely we would deploy both our F-15E dual role fighters and F-15C air superiority fighters. The F-15Cs would be going to Cervia, an operational air base still flying Lockheed F-104 Starfighters off of a minimum-spec NATO standard runway. American air forces had never used this facility in the past, and this one did not come close to the support provided at our main operating bases. Since this was going to be a near-bare base operation, FM would most likely be tasked to send a two-person Tactical Financial Services team. There was never any question that we would send our best-trained personnel. The crisis was real and we needed to be able to get there quickly, ready to fight.



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In FM, picking the A-team means those with the most current Top Dollar experience. SSgt Jackie McElroy and TSgt Larisa Toy had trained hard and scored well in USAFE's 98 Top Dollar competition held at Ramstein AB, Germany only a few months earlier. They were my first choice. On 9 October at 1007L, the wing received its deployment order to send about a dozen F-15Cs to Cervia. The major change was that we would use intratheatre airlift requiring the 48th

Fighter Wing to drastically reduce its footprint by 50%. Our sketchy information on Cervia indicated that lodging and meals would be provided. Because travel pay would be down to incidental expenses, we elected to send just one disbursing agent. SSgt McElroy would serve that role for the entire deployment. Instead of sending our entire LogDet kit, we slimmed it down to just a 280lb two-drawer safe, a laptop, and the most essential forms and regs. At about midnight Friday night, TSgt Darrell “He-Man” Hampton successfully muscled the safe down from our second floor vault out to a waiting forklift. Jackie would deploy with just the safe and two trunks of supplies.

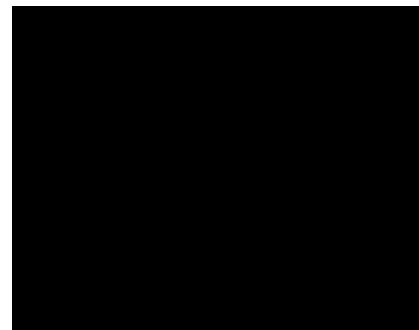
SSgt McElroy landed in Cervia at 0200L, 11 October—the beginning of US military operations. She was escorted by Italian military police to the command post to secure her funds and then to the armory to secure her weapon. A four-person advon team beat the first chalk in and reserved one hotel for the Americans, who then double and triple roomed for the first night. With the F-15Cs enroute along with 22 more chalks of pax and cargo, job one for the FM-contracting team was to secure rooms, local necessities and transportation for over 350 personnel. Although the vast majority would come from RAF Lakenheath, personnel from 9 Air Force bases made up the 48th Expeditionary Operations Group. It was a tailor-made dry run of the expeditionary concept which starts in FY00. The Expeditionary Air Force will draw chiefly from fighter aircraft like those from the Liberty Wing, the official name of the 48th Fighter Wing. The Air Force’s goal is to be able to provide an in-your-face deterrent to support contingencies anywhere, including austere locations.

Cervia Air Base was not austere, but it was largely an unknown to the 48th and some of our advance information was inaccurate. Neither on-base billeting nor food service would be available for anyone. Cervia had no commissary, no exchange, no fitness center, no library, no services activities, and no transient lodging. They did have a club but it was closed for renovations; and their dining facility could not accommodate the American influx. On the positive side, the Italian Air Force extended every hospitality, generously provided space in their facilities, and shared equipment whenever possible. Ironically, the bare base conditions at Cervia were in stark contrast to the nearby resort towns on the Italian Adriatic coastline. This was the off-season and most hotels were closed or closing. Not only that, the group came in on Sunday, and Monday was an Italian holiday. Luckily, through word of mouth between hotel owners, the 48th EOG eventually secured seven hotels within a fifteen-mile radius of the base, including some that had already been closed for the winter.

Financial support became a vital function to sustain our light, lean, and lethal force. With a lot of equipment left behind and individuals having to pay resort area prices for food, SSgt McElroy was a critical asset to group operations. Working long shifts to support contracting and individual members as well as establishing a cash pipeline with the Regional Accounting and Finance Office (RAFO) in Ramstein, she also opened a local bank account and made several runs to Aviano AB to work treasury check problems. The RAFO had prepositioned a check at Aviano for \$350K worth of Italian Lira. With Monday a holiday, this was an opportune time to get to Aviano and



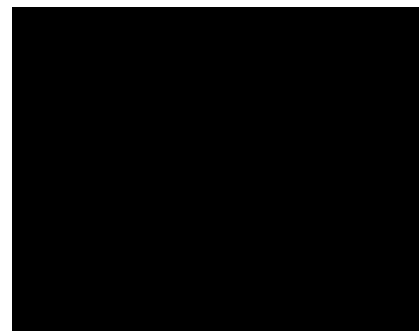
*SSgt Jackie McElroy*



*Italian Base Ops—site of 48th EOG War Operations Center, Finance Safe, Flight Surgeon, Public Affairs, Chaplain, & Legal*



*Location of Finance at Cervia.*



*48th EOG—Combat Communications*

## Finance Goes Expeditionary (Continued...)

secure the additional funds. These funds were deposited locally with a two-day hold placed by the bank. Holds on US treasury checks in dollars exceeded a week. Dealing with the cash flow problem proved to be particularly difficult and crimped financial operations.

With money in the bank, our disbursing agent spent a great deal of time with contracting paying for goods and services. Even in Western Europe, credit transactions like the IMPAC card are not always accepted. But cash is a universal language. Even without a warning order, we had increased our vault limit immediately from \$10,000 to \$100,000 and asked the bank to fully stock base ATMs. Again, operating with the information that dining services would be provided we paid limited amounts on the deployment line. When they got on the ground, members found that not only would they be eating on the economy, getting cash to buy food would be difficult. They were only able to find three ATMs in nearby towns that would accept American Express, the government traveler's card at the time. To make matters worse, American Express unilaterally reduced cash withdrawals to only \$500 per month as they were drawing the contract down. The AMEX GTC quickly gained a reputation as the card you could leave home without. Thus, the need for on site paylines was almost immediate.

The high cost of food, laundry, and incidentals in the vicinity quickly became a morale problem. At the time of the deployment, Cervia was not a listed location in the JFTR and fell into the "All other, Italy" rate of \$70 a day for MIE. Our personnel were spending money out of pocket to support themselves. This became a 'high-viz' issue, and the 48 CPTS provided necessary reachback support. Using home-based subject matter expertise with modern communications systems helps reduce the size of the deployed force and is part of the expeditionary concept. We advised the local commander to use Actual Expense Authority, but the record keeping requirement was deemed too onerous for a time-constrained, real-world operation. Subsequently, CMSgt John Randolph, 48 EOG services, provided local expense information that we used in a message requesting PDTATAC approve an immediate out-of-cycle adjustment for deployed personnel. With assistance from USAFE/FMF, a temporary per diem rate of \$112 per day was established effective 1 November for deployed members only. Meanwhile, retail price survey work continued resulting in a formal rate for Cervia at \$84 per day effective 1 December 98.



TSgt LaRisaToy

While we were working the per diem issue at home station, the individual pay situation at Cervia was becoming more pronounced. Finally, the 48th EOG/CC requested additional financial support. We were back to the original UTC of a two-person tactical financial services team. TSgt Larisa Toy who had been on standby the entire time, left for Cervia as soon as USAFE validated the JOPES manpower request. Arriving on 26 Oct, TSgt Toy ran paylines about four hours a day, four days a week often averaging between 150 to 200 customers per payline. That means a significant percentage of the deployed force was coming back about every third day because cash limitations prevented TSgt Toy from paying an amount sufficient to last at least a week. The rest of her time was spent as an on-site FSO answering routine pay and travel inquiries.

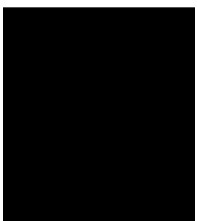
Operation Sky Anvil achieved its short run political objective. The 48th EOG had flown 217 sorties in just 26 days with a 92% fully mission capable rate—a clear signal to the Serbians that we were in position and ready. On 6 November, the redeployment order was issued. TSgt Toy returned to RAF Lakenheath on 11 November and SSgt Jackie McElroy returned on 15 November. Both agreed that Top

Dollar had been an invaluable experience in preparing them for this near-bare base experience. Cervia will serve as a template on how to conduct expeditionary missions that broaden the concept of long-range airpower. But more importantly, the deployment demonstrated that sometimes comptroller personnel are the Air Force's lead warriors.

## Lessons Learned

1. **Finance is an essential component of the Expeditionary Air Force.** Assuming we are not fighting our way in, our personnel need to be first on the ground with Contracting; particularly in bare base situations.
2. **Advance information is critical to an Expeditionary Force.** General John P. Jumper, USAFE/CC, said “We shouldn’t have to ask any questions about the base at Cervia when it gets time to deploy there.” High fidelity, on demand site surveys of potential operating locations are a must. Those surveys should include accurate billeting, food service options, banking, and ATM information.
3. **Cash is still king.** Not all banks will take US treasury checks. Not all businesses will accept credit instruments. Again, the more austere the operating location, the greater the need for cash. Take LOTS!
4. **A two-person team is essential if pay lines are expected in a bare base situation.** With the disbursing agent monopolized by contracting, a paying agent can handle the pay lines and work other financial issues.
5. **Expect the unexpected.** There were many financial issues beyond what has been covered in this article. Anything and everything is in the realm of possibility.

## About the Author



**L**ieutenant Colonel Paul Hough is the Commander, 48th Comptroller Squadron, RAF Lakenheath UK. Previous assignments include Deputy Director of the Professional Military Comptroller School and Commander, 347th Comptroller Squadron, Moody AFB GA. Additionally, he has served in SAF/FMBP, AFCAA, Project Air Force, HQ TAC, 56 TTW at MacDill AFB FL, and the Strategic Systems Project Office at Wright-Patterson AFB OH.

